

Statement of Commissioner Susan Ness
Federal Communications Commission
before the
Committee on Commerce Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
March 23, 2000

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today.

I want to begin by thanking both the Committee Chairman, Senator McCain, for scheduling this hearing and the Subcommittee Chairman, Senator Burns, for agreeing to chair it. I also want to thank the Ranking Member, Senator Hollings, for his invaluable assistance, and the senators from my home state of Maryland, Senator Mikulski and Senator Sarbanes, for their support and friendship.

It is a great privilege to be entrusted -- along with my four colleagues and a staff of dedicated employees -- with implementation of our Nation's communications laws. Through the Commission's implementation of those laws, we seek to effectuate your vision -- that I share -- of competition and innovation throughout the communications industry; of access for all Americans to advanced services; of elimination of outdated regulations; and of opened global markets. I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to serve in a position to promote these goals, and with your consent, I will continue to do so.

I have been fortunate to serve at an extraordinary time. When I first appeared before this Committee in 1994, the Internet was still a nascent network used predominantly by academia. Less than 10 percent of Americans had cellular phones. Spectrum licenses were awarded by lotteries, not auctions. There was no direct broadcast satellite service. And local telephone competition was largely a dream.

Today, the Internet has revolutionized the way we live, work, and play. Over sixty percent of Americans now use the World Wide Web on a regular basis. Eighty million Americans subscribe to mobile telephone service. Over 8,000 spectrum licenses have been awarded by auction. Direct broadcast satellite is the fastest-growing video service. And there are a multitude of new companies aiming to provide consumers with choices for their local and advanced telecommunications services.

But the best is yet to come.

Over the next five years and beyond, the Internet will profoundly change the way we live and work. The convergence of previously separate industries will allow information and content, whether voice, data or video, to be transmitted virtually any time and any place over an

ever-expanding number of paths. Multiple broadband pipelines, both wired and wireless, will bring a new generation of applications to consumers. Millions of devices, from soda machines to mobile phones will communicate directly on the Internet. New technologies such as software defined radio and spread spectrum devices, will fundamentally challenge the way we think of spectrum allocation. Together, these innovations will provide consumers with a wealth of new choices and lower prices. Our task is to insure that *all* Americans have access to the wealth of benefits and opportunities flowing from this telecommunications revolution.

Mr. Chairman, the future depends upon innovation. And the Commission plays an important role. We foster innovation when we create opportunities for new technologies, whether wired or wireless, to reach users. We foster innovation when we reform rules and practices that impede competitive forces. And we foster innovation when we reduce barriers to investment and open markets to competition. But we must do so at a pace consistent with digital age speed and efficiency.

We live in a global economy. Countries around the world have looked to the leadership of the United States in opening telecommunications markets to competition. We can be proud of our record at home and abroad.

Mr. Chairman, I am excited about the future. That is why I am so enthusiastic about participating in the effort to transform your vision into reality. That is why I would be honored to serve the American people during this time of unprecedented change.

Thank you.